



The New York State Office of Religious and Independent Schools

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE CENTER (PDRC)

The Upstate PDRC – All NYS Regions North of NYC

At Home, At School

What can we learn from
experienced home educators?

Unexpected homeschooling



In the current environment of remote learning, **what can we learn from those already experienced at teaching students at home?**

Learning at home is not a new practice...

In early America, families educated their children at home, combining the efforts of parents, tutors, and older children.

The rural one-room schoolhouse was created by families that united to hire a teacher who could substitute for parents, using the same methodology of direct instruction, tutoring, and mentoring by older students.

Today, many families choose to educate their children at home, either as a *first choice* or a *second choice*.

We will look at:

- Homeschooling as a chosen practice
- Opportunities to reframe learning and teaching according to those experienced in this model
- Best practices from the literature and interviews with homeschool practitioners



Homeschooling as a chosen practice

In her 2012 study, *Home is Where the School Is*, author Jennifer Lois categorizes home educators as “first choice” or “second choice” homeschoolers.

First choice home educators are those who feel that homeschooling is the best match for their children, whether for philosophical or pedagogical reasons.

Second choice home educators, in contrast, are those who choose homeschooling after institutional schooling fails to meet their children.

The parent-educators interviewed for this project represent both first choice and second choice experiences.



Why are they home?

The most common reasons given for homeschooling are the following:

- To individualize the curriculum and learning environment for the needs of each child
- To accomplish more than is possible in a school setting
- To use pedagogical approaches that are not typically found in schools
- To strengthen relationships between children and their siblings and parents
- To provide a safer environment for children and youth, one that is free of bullying, drugs/alcohol, racism, unhealthy sexuality
- To teach and impart a particular set of values, beliefs and worldviews

Source: National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Dept of Education

Homeschooling models for specific purposes & philosophies

- **School-at-Home**..... most like institutional schooling
- Classical
- Charlotte Mason
- Montessori-Inspired
- Unit Study
- Waldorf-Inspired
- Eclectic
- **Unschooling**..... least like institutional schooling



Source: HomeEducator.com, “Types of Homeschooling”

Reported benefits of home education

- Flexible scheduling
- Time efficiency
- Personalized instruction
- Unpressured learning
- Well-rounded program, with time for clubs, art, music, athletics, play
- Student agency, voice and curiosity cultivated

Source: National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Dept of Education.

Practitioner voices

For this project, current and former long-term homeschool parents were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. The Upstate PDRC would like to thank:



Lynn Malooly, founder, Lilac Children's Garden and former homeschool parent of 3 in Rochester, NY

Debra Nicastro, owner, School Solutions Consulting and former homeschool parent of 4 in Saratoga Springs, NY

Arianna Breitstein, homeschool parent in Ballston Lake NY

Mark O'Brien, homeschool parent in Saratoga Springs NY

Three interview questions: what can we learn from home educators?

For this project, participating homeschool parents were asked to reflect on what it would be like to move from institutional schooling to unanticipated homeschooling--without the element of choice or planning.



- What principles of homeschool education are important for teachers/parents new to this context to think about?
- What can teachers new to a home-based learning environment learn from experienced homeschoolers?
- What in your opinion are the best practices of homeschooling?

Practitioner voices: distinctions of homeschooling

“Homeschooling is a way of life. It is nothing like school.”

“Homeschool is not school, and there is no need to transfer or replicate the frantic pace of school in a 1:1 setting.”

“Homeschool expands the concept of what is educational. Laser focusing on academic skills is not a priority of homeschoolers.”

“I think about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs -- what does the student need first?”

“Everything is a learning opportunity.”

“Curiosity and engagement can come back if you let go of the need to control learning.”

“Embrace the slower pace and the lack of pressure.”

“No one needs to sit at a desk for 6 hours.”

Practitioner voices: some thoughts on digital learning

“Homeschooling is relational -- don’t over-rely on digital learning or set up learning that is only tied to screens.”

“Homeschooling is a way of life and it is not separate from “real life”. I like to use real-world activities and life skills that can be woven into my learning objectives.”

“Homeschooling parents, extended family, friends and older brothers and sisters involved as teachers -- we set students up to fail if we focus on digital learning.”

“My children spend their morning online doing school work. It’s important to set limits on screen-time, especially for younger children.”



Practitioner voices: the opportunity to personalize instruction

“One thing I think that homeschooling enables is not only time for lecture and project, but equal time for discussion of the evaluation of the project. You have the luxury to not have to move on to the next subject because a schedule dictates but to “stay” until the lesson is understood. In this regard, homeschooling is truly where no child gets left behind.”-- Mark O’Brien, homeschool educator

“If at all possible, teachers should focus on developing assignments that are open-ended or at least allow plenty of flexibility for students to choose their topics and follow their interests. Allowing students to choose their topics of study will increase the likelihood of their staying engaged and motivated.”-- Arianna Breitstein, homeschool educator

“It is really important to follow a rhythm -- a rhythm of the day, the week and the season. Rhythm allows the child to sink into a reliable and predictable learning environment.”-- Lynn Malooly, homeschool educator

“What does a student need first? If they are hungry, tired or scared, they aren’t going to learn. As teachers, we need to have the same kind of eye on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs whether we are at home in the classroom.”-- Debra Nicastro, homeschool educator

Practitioner voices: a non-exhaustive set of best practices

Parents interviewed cited the following practices as highly supportive of their home teaching:

- Student-led inquiry-based learning
- Long-term, student-driven, project-based learning
- Personalization
- Extensive reading and read-aloud time.
- Mastery-based math program
- Providing a menu of options, not obligations, for each learning goal
- Engaging older students in setting the learning environment, goals and schedule
- Establishing more time for younger students to play, explore and interact with trusted adults
- Making time for movement and kinesthetic learning every day

Recommendations for Remote Learning

- Project calm, warmth and flexibility to students in all communications.
- Create a daily schedule, but be ready to let go of it.
- Recognize that school may be a low priority for some families at this time, and manage expectations.
- Use synchronous digital platforms to bring classes together for a regular social check-in and sense of belonging.
- Partner with caregivers and provide time for them to consult with teachers; i.e., office hours.
- Provide early childhood students time to play, make crafts, be read to and help around the home and yard.
- Aim for 1 hour per grade of focused academic time in grades 1-3. Resist the temptation to “keep them busy” or worry too much about students falling behind.
- Engage older students in setting their own goals from a menu of options (flexibility is key).
- Integrate strands of the curriculum through project-based learning.
- Remote learning is not school. Let it be different. Don’t try to do too much in the beginning.



The temporary one-room schoolhouse

Just like the American pioneers, we are making history in this unprecedented moment. What will making the most of *unexpected homeschooling* look like? What will our children remember, and tell their children about, when they recall the “Great School Closure of 2020”? And how will the choices of educators and parents shape those recollections?

The Professional Development Resource Center for Upstate New York is here to support non-public school educators, school leaders and families as we all respond to the evolving educational landscape. For more resources, information and professional support, please bookmark the PDRC-Upstate/North of NY website at <https://www.nysed-soris-upstate-pdrc.org/>.



Other resources like this

- “Emergency Homeschooling: How to Support Your Kids During a Coronavirus School Closure” at

<https://responsiblehomeschooling.org/emergency-homeschooling-how-to-support-your-kids-during-a-coronavirus-school-closure/>

- “Emergency Homeschooling” at <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/homeschooling-curriculum-online/>

- “Coronavirus: Temporary Homeschool Solutions” at <https://www.homeschool.com/blog/emergency-homeschooling-solutions>

Sources

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